



# A Moveable Feast

Lux Catering perfects mobile haute cuisine.

By Jeanne Ferris | Photos provided by Lux Catering

Soft candlelight, melodious music and aromatic flowers are just supporting cast members to the real celebrity at important social or business gatherings. Even the stars sparkling in the inky sky cannot deter one's gaze from the star here on earth—a sumptuous feast.

The allure of a platter containing refined portions of sliced Australian rack of lamb beckons guests to reach out in gastronomical lust as it passes by. These lamb chops have been encrusted with ground pistachios and lavender honey mustard, and are served with fresh ruby red cranberry, raspberry and rosemary compote. It is all perfectly in season and seasoned, and so tender, it can be cut with a fork. You almost want to risk licking your fingers in public so you don't waste a single morsel.

The process to bring this small bite to a

tray is nothing short of art. The ribs have been painstakingly “Frenched”—that is, the fat between the bones has been removed—and baked while covered with parchment paper and foil to maintain the correct color. While most Americans prefer medium rare, it is *de rigueur* in France to serve lamb rare, and this technique allows for an aesthetic presentation while maintaining the integrity of the preferred color of cooked bone, which is white.

“Most people don't realize they eat with their eyes first,” explains Mike Hultquist, a chef at Lux Catering. “How food looks is so important.”

Along with chef Yasmine Ghougassian, Hultquist has devoted himself to the craft of catering. Both graduates of San Diego Culinary Institute, Hultquist and Ghougassian decided to combine their

culinary talents and take the fine dining farm-to-table trend mobile.

Ghougassian, who is of Lebanese descent, was born into a diplomatic corps family in Qatar.

“I grew up in a household that regularly entertained an international palette on a large scale, which was also protocol-oriented,” she explained. “I learned early on about formal dining through my mother, who oversaw the menu and the purchasing of the ingredients personally even though we had staff who assisted her.”

Hultquist grew up closer to home in Tucson, Ariz., and is of Swedish and Mexican heritage. His childhood was spent in and around family-owned Mexican fine dining restaurants and cantinas. “Tamales and refried beans are such a huge part of who I am,” he said. “I can't think of



anything better. I love to use all Latin spices and chilies—I love the balance of spicy and savory as well as sweet and salty.”

The duo combined their rich contrast in styles and culture into Lux Catering, a fusion created by their shared interest in using only local, seasonal and—whenever possible—organic produce, protein, seafood and seasoning.

“In the winter months, foods tend to be heartier and prepared with richer and heavier sauces with more braising and slow cooking,” Ghougassian explained. “In summer, we see lighter, fresher flavor profiles with citrus, lighter sauces and more grilling.”

Mini martini glasses containing intriguing edible art of the Mediterranean ahi crudo intertwined with fennel, radishes and Meyer lemon vinaigrette and topped with a

gossamer sprig of dill is not to be outdone by the traditional, but still refreshing, Hawaiian-style ahi poke, consisting of avocado, cilantro and tiny minced green onions. A Latin twist is Ahi Sashimo, rolled with cilantro inside and nestled in a bed of spicy and sweet Habanero mango glaze that provides an aftertaste with a kick and a kiss.

Yellowfin isn't the only thing on the menu. “I am a fan of all pork products such as pork belly and pork lardon,” Hultquist added. This specialty cut is liberally mixed into one of Lux's signature dishes—Bruschetta alla Delizioso, a crostini brushed with shallot oil and a mélange of goat cheese, thyme mousse, sweet roasted butternut squash, fig and bacon. All evenly cubed in easy bite-sized proportions, the dish is a loving homage to biblical ingredients, Western flavors and the

season of winter, and the bacon is both a guilty pleasure and a delicious surprise.

In addition to this feast are two moist multi-grain savory bread pudding dishes, one with fig and sage and the other with cranberry, walnut, savory sage served with roasted Brussels sprouts, snow-white cauliflower florets and crunchy carrots. It's ordinary winter vegetables made extraordinary by the naturally occurring caramelization created by roasting.

Ernest Hemingway wrote in his memoir, “If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast.”

And if you are lucky enough to have experienced Lux Catering, it is a moveable feast that remains in your memory for a long time. ■